Tales from Graceland Cemetery

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All cemeteries are full of unique stories about the people buried there. Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery has its share of exciting tales as well. The first curious tale is that of William T. Stackpole. He was one of early Fairbury's most interesting citizens. He lived from 1827 until 1894. During his life, William was a gold prospector, pioneer, farmer, merchant, grain speculator, oil field worker, real estate salesperson, inventor, writer, publisher, and visionary. His house still stands on the northeast corner of West Maple and North Webster streets at the southeast corner of Marsh Park.

After losing three fortunes, when William T. Stackpole died in 1894, he was penniless and buried in an unmarked grave at Graceland Cemetery. His surviving wife and daughter continued to live in their home by Marsh Park. In those days, there was no Social Security system, so his wife and daughter were destitute. Nearby neighbors tried to give them food. The wife Jennie died in 1908, and then his daughter Anna died in 1940. William, his wife Jennie, and daughter Anna are all buried in unmarked graves at Graceland.

Fairbury was shocked in 1899 when the very popular Fred Baird was murdered. He was the modern equivalent of both Fire Chief and Police Chief. Fred was first buried in the small Cooper Cemetery about seven miles south and two miles west of Fairbury. The whole town of Fairbury took up a collection to buy him a beautiful gravestone and to bury him at Graceland. The community collection drive was successful, and today Fred is buried with a beautiful tombstone at Graceland, east of the Mausoleum.

Thomas A. Beach was the wealthiest man to ever live in Fairbury. He was a banker and businessman. In 1872, Beach built a new house on East Hickory Street. The house is an excellent example of the Italianate architecture style. In 1983, this home was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Fairbury residents commonly call it the "Lion House" because of the two concrete lions in the front yard. Mr. Beach also had a private family mausoleum constructed at Graceland Cemetery. At the time of his death in 1911, his net worth is estimated to be more than $50 million in today's dollars.

Fairbury made the national newspapers in January of 1917. Two citizens of Fairbury, Stephen Young, and Sophia Lancaster died in the same week, and their relatives claimed they were each 117 years old. Both of these citizens were African Americans, and both were former slaves. Both of these individuals were buried in the oldest part of Graceland Cemetery along south Seventh Street.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, many soldiers from other states moved to Fairbury. The vast majority of these soldiers served in the Union forces. Two former Confederate soldiers also moved to Fairbury, but they kept their military service relatively quiet.

One of these former Confederate soldiers was Madison Kershner. He was born in West Virginia and served in the Confederate Army. In 1914, Mr. Kershner, his wife, and nine children moved to a home at 606 East Elm Street in Fairbury. They attended the Fairbury Baptist Church. Mr. Kershner was well-liked in the community. In 1916, at the age of 74, Mr. Kershner died and was buried in Graceland Cemetery.

A very unusual incident occurred in October of 1942 in Fairbury. A 76-year-old man was pushing a cart along Route 24 in Fairbury. Someone in an auto struck him and threw him 55 feet from the point of impact. The man was still alive when the first motorist stopped to investigate. A World War II sugar rationing card, found in the man's pocket, indicated he was Rhinehart Lyons from Plainfield, Illinois. The man matched the height and weight shown on the rationing card. Just before the man died, he said his name was Hanson, and he was from Paxton.

Authorities called to Plainfield officials and inquired about Mr. Lyons. The Plainfield authorities said he periodically visited Plainfield to sharpen items, but he had no home there. Fairbury citizens contacted Paxton officials, and they reported Mr. Lyons did not live there either. When officials examined the man's two-wheel cart, they found a one-person tent, bedding, and some food. Authorities concluded the man had no permanent home, and he slept along the road.

After searching for one week, authorities gave up on finding a next of kin. Coroner Essington ordered the body to be interred. Rhinehart Lyons was buried in an unmarked grave in Graceland Cemetery.

The most nationally famous person buried at Graceland Cemetery is the world-class motorcycle racer Carl Goudy. Carl and his brother William grew up in Fairbury. Both boys took an interest in motorcycles when they began to appear in the early 1910s. Very quickly, both brothers became motorcycle racers at tracks all over the United States. Carl Goudy reached his peak in late 1915 when he won the prestigious Chicago motorcycle race. After the Chicago race was over, Carl loaned his high-speed motorcycle to his brother William Goudy.

William Goudy took the fast bike to a California race track. William and another professional racer started doing practice laps on the track. A third professional driver entered the field and passed the other two drivers. After he passed William and the other driver, he accidentally dumped his motorcycle on the track. To avoid hitting the downed bike and driver, William swerved in one direction, and the other driver swerved in the other direction. Unfortunately, both William and the other driver were instantly killed when they struck objects on the track's border. Carl Goudy buried his brother William Goudy in a nearby California Cemetery.

After William's death in January of 1916, Carl's Fairbury grade-school sweetheart, Hazel Dominy Bane, agreed to marry Carl if he first gave up motorcycle racing. Carl gave up motorcycle racing and married Hazel in July of 1916. Carl went on to have a very

successful business career in New York. Both Carl and his wife Hazel are interred in the Fairbury Mausoleum.

World Motorcycle Champion Carl Goudy and his wife are interred at the Graceland Mausoleum